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# The Spirit of Lawlessness

January 8, 1922

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## A Word to Labor

# The Catholic Mind

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## The Spirit of Lawlessness

JAMES M. BECK

ONE of the most quoted—and also misquoted—Proverbs of the wise Solomon says, as translated in the authorized version: "Where there is no vision, *the people perish.*" What Solomon actually said was: "Where there is no vision, the people *cast off restraint.*" The translator thus confused a cause with a result. What was the vision to which the Wise Man referred? The rest of the Proverb, which is rarely quoted, explains: "Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint; but he that keepeth the law, happy is he."

The vision, then, is the authority of law, and Solomon's warning is that to which the great and noble founder of Pennsylvania many centuries later gave utterance, when he said: "That government is free to the people under it, where the laws rule and the people are a party to those laws; and all the rest is tyranny, oligarchy and confusion."

### PSYCHOLOGY OF REVOLT

It is my purpose to discuss the moral psychology of the present revolt against the spirit of authority. Too little consideration has been paid in our profession to questions of moral psychology. These have been left to metaphysicians and ecclesiastics, and yet—to paraphrase the saying of the Master—"the laws were made for man, and not man for the laws," and if the science of the law ignores the study of human nature and attempts to conform man to the laws, rather than the laws to man, then its development is a very partial and imperfect one.

Let me first be sure of my premises. Is there in this day and generation a spirit of lawlessness greater or different than that which has always existed in human society, even when the penalty of death was visited upon nearly all offenses against life and property? Blackstone tells us (Book IV, Chap. 1) that in the eighteenth century, it was a capital offense to cut down a cherry-tree in an orchard, a penalty which should increase our admiration for George Washington's courage and veracity.

We are apt to see the past in a golden haze, which ob-

scures our vision. Thus, we think of William Penn's "holy experiment" on the banks of the Delaware as the realization of Sir Thomas More's dream of Utopia; and yet Pennsylvania was called in 1698 "the greatest refuge for pirates and rogues in America," and Penn himself wrote, about that time, that he had heard of no place which was "more overrun with wickedness" than his City of Brotherly Love, where things were so "openly committed in defiance of law and virtue—facts so foul that I am forbid by common modesty to relate them."

#### ALARMING STATISTICS

Conceding that lawlessness is not a novel phenomenon, has not the present age been characterized by an exceptional revolt against the authority of law? The statistics of our criminal courts show in recent years an unprecedented growth in crimes. Thus, in the Federal Courts, pending criminal indictments have increased from 9,503 in the year 1912 to over 70,000 in the year 1921. While this abnormal increase is, in part, due to sumptuary legislation, for approximately 30,000 cases now pending arise under the Prohibition statutes, yet, eliminating these, there yet remains an increase in nine years of nearly four-hundred per cent in the comparatively narrow sphere of the Federal criminal jurisdiction. I have been unable to get the data from the State Courts; but the growth of crimes can be measured by a few illustrative statistics. Thus, the losses from burglaries which have been repaid by casualty companies have grown in amount from \$886,000 in 1914 to over \$10,000,000 in 1920; and, in like periods, embezzlements have increased fivefold. It is notorious that the thefts from the mails and express companies and other carriers have grown to enormous proportions. The holdup of railroad trains is now of frequent occurrence, and is not confined to the unsettled portions of the country. Not only in the United States, but even in Europe, such crimes of violence are of increasing frequency, and a dispatch from Berne, under date of August 7, 1921, stated that the famous international expresses of Europe were run under a military guard.

The streets of our cities, once reasonably secure from

crimes of violence, have now become the field of operations for the footpad and highwayman. The days of Dick Turpin and Jack Shepherd have returned, with this serious difference, that the Turpins and Shepherds of our day are not dependent upon the horse, but have the powerful automobile to facilitate their crimes and make sure their escape.

#### INCREASE OF CRIME

In Chicago alone five thousand automobiles were stolen in a single year. Once, murder was an infrequent and abnormal crime. Today, in our large cities, it is of almost daily occurrence. In New York, in 1917, there were 236 murders and only 67 convictions. In Chicago, in 1919, there were 336 and 44 convictions. When the crime wave was at its height, a few years ago, the police authorities in more than one city confessed their impotence to impose effective restraints. Life and property had seemingly become almost as insecure as during the Middle Ages.

As to the subtler and more insidious crimes against the political State, it is enough to say that graft has become a science in city, State and nation. Losses by such misapplication of funds, piled Pelion on Ossa, no longer run in the millions, but the hundreds of millions. Our city governments are, in many instances, foul cancers on the body politic; and for us to boast of having solved the problem of self-government is as fatuous as for a strong man to exult in his health when his body is covered with running sores. It has been estimated that the annual profits from violations of the Prohibition laws have reached \$300,000,000. Men who thus violate these laws for sordid gain are not likely to obey other laws, and the respect for law among all classes steadily diminishes as our people become familiar with, and tolerant of, wholesale criminality. Whether the moral and economic results of Prohibition overbalance this rising wave of crime, time will tell.

*In limine*, let us note the significant fact that this spirit of revolt against authority is not confined to the political State, and therefore its causes are not confined to that sphere of human action. Human life is governed by all

manner of man-made laws—laws of art, of social intercourse, of literature, music, business—all evolved by custom and imposed by the collective will of society. Here we find the same revolt against tradition and authority.

#### ESTHETIC BOLSHEVIKI

In music, its fundamental canons have been thrown aside and discord has been substituted for harmony as its ideal. Its culmination—jazz—is a musical crime.

In the plastic arts, all the laws of form and the criteria of beauty have been swept aside by the futurists, cubists, vorticists, tactilists, and other esthetic Bolsheviks.

In poetry, where beauty of rhythm, melody of sound and nobility of thought were once regarded as the true tests, we now have the exaltation of the grotesque and brutal; and hundreds of poets are feebly echoing the "barbaric yawp" of Walt Whitman, without the redeeming merit of his occasional sublimity of thought. In commerce, the revolt is one against the purity of standards and the integrity of business morals. Who can question that this is preeminently the age of the sham and the counterfeit? Science is prostituted to deceive the public by cloaking the increasing deterioration in quality. The blatant medium of advertising has become so mendacious as to defeat its own purpose.

In the recent deflation in commodity values, there was widespread "welching" among business men who had theretofore been classed as reputable. Of course, I recognize that a far greater number kept their contracts, even when it brought them to the verge of ruin. But where in the history of American business was there such a volume of broken faith as a year ago?

In the greater sphere of social life we find the same revolt against the institutions which have the sanction of the past. Laws which mark the decent restraints of print, speech and dress have, in recent decades, been increasingly disregarded. The very foundations of the great and primitive institutions of mankind, like the family, the Church, and the State, have been shaken. Nature itself is defied. Youth rebels against age, sex against sex, and the fundamental difference of sex is disregarded by social movements which ignore the per-

manent differentiation of social function ordained by God Himself.

All these are but illustrations of the general revolt against the authority of the past, a revolt that can be measured by the change in the fundamental presumption of men with respect to the value of human experience. In all former ages, all that was in the past was presumptively true, and the burden was upon him who sought to change it. Today, the human mind apparently regards the lessons of the past as presumptively false, and the burden is upon him who seeks to invoke them.

### THE POPE'S TESTIMONY

Lest I be accused of pessimism, let me cite as a witness one who, of all men, is probably best equipped to express an opinion upon the moral state of the world. I refer to the venerable head of that religious organization which, with its trained representatives in every part of the world, is probably better informed as to its spiritual state than any other organization. Speaking Christmas Eve, 1920, in an address to the College of Cardinals, Pope Benedict said that five plagues were now afflicting humanity. The first was the unprecedented challenge of authority. The second, an equally unprecedented hatred between man and man. The third was the abnormal aversion to work. The fourth, the excessive thirst for pleasure as the great aim of life. And the fifth, a gross materialism which denied the reality of the spiritual in human life. The accuracy of this indictment will commend itself to men who, like myself, are not of Pope Benedict's communion.

I trust that I have already shown that the challenge to authority is universal and is not confined to that of the political State. Even in the narrower confines of the latter, the fires of revolution are either violently burning, or, at least, smoldering. Two of the oldest empires in the world, which, together, have more than half of its population, China and Russia, are in a welter of anarchy; while Egypt, Mesopotamia and British India are in a state of revolt. If such disintegration were confined to autocratic governments, we might see in it merely a reaction against tyranny; but even in the most stable

of democracies and among the most enlightened peoples, the underground rumblings of revolution may be heard.

The government of Italy has been preserved from overthrow, not alone by its constituted authorities, but by a band of resolute men, called the "Fascisti," who have taken the law into their own hands, as did the vigilance committees in western mining camps, to put down worse disorders.

#### ENGLAND'S FLIGHT

Even England, the mother of democracies, and once the most stable of all governments in the maintenance of law, has been shaken to its very foundations in the last three years, when powerful groups of men attempted to seize the State by the throat and compel submission to their demands by threatening to starve the community. This would be serious enough if it were only the world-old struggle between capital and labor and had only involved the conditions of manual toil. But the insurrection against the political State in England was more political than it was economic. It marked, on the part of millions of men, a portentous decay of belief in representative government and its chosen organ—the ballot-box. Great and powerful groups had suddenly discovered—and it may be the most portentous discovery of the twentieth century—that the power involved in their control over the necessities of life, as compared with the power of the voting franchise, was as a forty-two centimeter cannon to the bow and arrow. The end sought to be attained, namely, the nationalization of the basic industries, and even the control of the foreign policy of Great Britain, vindicated the truth of the British Prime Minister's statement that these great strikes involved something more than a mere struggle over the conditions of labor, and that they were essentially seditious attempts against the life of the State.

Nor were they altogether unsuccessful; for, when the armies of Lenin and Trotzky were at the gates of Warsaw, in the summer of 1920, the attempts of the Governments of England and Belgium to afford assistance to the embattled Poles were paralyzed by the labor groups of both countries, who threatened a general strike if



those two nations joined with France in aiding Poland to resist a possibly greater menace to Western civilization than has occurred since Attila and his Huns stood on the banks of the Marne. What is more portentous, England and Belgium both conformed their foreign policy to the demands of labor.

#### INTERNATIONAL LAW IGNORED

Of greater significance to the welfare of civilization is the complete subversion during the World War of nearly all the international laws which had been slowly built up in a thousand years. These principles, as codified by the two Hague Conventions, were immediately swept aside in the fierce struggle for existence, and civilized man, with his liquid fire and poison gas and his deliberate attacks upon undefended cities and their women and children, waged war with the unrelenting ferocity of primitive times. Surely, this fierce war of extermination, which caused the loss of three hundred billions in property and thirty millions of human lives, did mark the "twilight of civilization."

Nor will many question the accuracy of the second count in Pope Benedict's indictment. The war to end war only ended in unprecedented hatred between nation and nation, class and class, and man and man. Victors and vanquished are involved in a common ruin. And if in this deluge which has submerged the world there is a Mount Ararat, upon which the ark of a truer and better peace can find refuge, it has not yet appeared above the troubled surface of the waters.

Still less can one question the closely related third and fourth counts in Pope Benedict's indictment, namely, the unprecedented aversion to work, when work is most needed to reconstruct the foundations of prosperity, or the excessive thirst for pleasure which preceded, accompanied, and now has followed the most terrible tragedy in the annals of mankind. The true spirit of work seems to have vanished from millions of men; that spirit of which Shakespeare made his Orlando speak when he said of his true servant, Adam:

O, good o'd man! how well in thee appears  
The constant service of the antique world,  
When service sweat for duty, not for mead!

The *morale* of our industrial civilization has been shattered. Work for work's sake, as the most glorious privilege of human faculties, has gone, both as an ideal and as a potent spirit. The conception of work as a degrading servitude, to be done with reluctance and grudging inefficiency, seems to be the ideal of millions of men of all classes and in all countries.

The spirit of work is of more than sentimental importance. It may be said of it, as Hamlet says of death: "The readiness is all." All of us are conscious of the fact that, given a love of work, the capacity for it seems almost illimitable—as witness Napoleon, with his thousand-man power, or Shakespeare, who in twenty years could write more than twenty masterpieces. On the other hand, given an aversion to work, and the less a man does, the less he wants to do, or is seemingly capable of doing.

#### AVERSION TO WORK

The great evil of the world today is this aversion to work. As the mechanical era diminished the element of physical exertion in work, we would have supposed that man would have sought expression for his physical faculties in other ways. On the contrary, the whole history of the mechanical era is a persistent struggle for more pay and shorter hours, and today it has culminated in world-wide ruin; for there is not a nation in civilization which is not now in the throes of economic distress, and many of them are on the verge of ruin. In my judgment, the economic catastrophe of 1921 is far greater than the politico-military catastrophe of 1914.

The result of these two tendencies, measured in the statistics of productive industry, are literally appalling. Thus, in 1920, Italy, according to statistics of her Minister of Labor, lost 55,000,000 days of work because of strikes alone. From July to September, many great factories were in the hands of revolutionary communists. A full third of these strikes had for their end political and not economic purposes. In Germany, the progressive revolt of labor against work is thus measured by competent authority: there were lost in strikes in 1917, 900,000 working days; in 1918, 4,900,000, and, in 1919,

46,600,000. Even in our favored land the same phenomena are observable. In the State of New York alone for 1920 there was loss from strikes alone of over 10,000,000 working days. In all countries the losses by such cessations from labor are little as compared with those due to the spirit which in England is called "ca'canney," or the shirking of performance of work, and of sabotage, which means the deliberate destruction of machinery in operation. Everywhere the phenomenon has been observed that, with the highest wages known in the history of modern times, there has been an unmistakable lessening of efficiency, and that with an increase in the number of workers, there has been a decrease in output. Thus, the transportation companies in this country have seriously made a claim against the United States Government for damages to their roads, amounting to \$750,000,000, claimed to be due to the inefficiency of labor during the period of governmental operation.

#### THIRST FOR PLEASURE

Accompanying this indisposition to work efficiently, has been a mad desire for pleasure such as, if it existed in like measure in preceding ages, has not been seen within the memory of living man. Man has danced upon the verge of a social abyss, and even the dancing has, both in form and in accompanying music, lost its former grace and reverted to the primitive forms of uncivilized conditions.

There is no better evidence of this excessive thirst for pleasure than the newspaper press, which is, in our time, the "brief abstract and chronicle of the times," and which shows the body of the age, "its form and pressure." What a transformation of human values the modern newspaper discloses! Once largely the record of man's higher achievements, in its discussion of literature, art, science, and politics, today its space is largely devoted to the ephemeral and the trivial. Pages and pages are devoted to sport, and even to ignoble forms of sport; while literary, art and musical reviews and scientific discussions are either omitted altogether, or are grudgingly given a little space once a week.

What better illustration of this extraordinary revaluation of personalities and incidents than the recent pugilistic duel between two combatants in Jersey City, a duel which was in marked contrast to another fateful encounter on the heights of Weehawken more than a century ago? Nearly one hundred thousand men and women of all classes and conditions and from all parts of the world assembled in Jersey City on July 2, many of them only to gratify their jaded appetites for a new thrill; and for months and months before and for weeks thereafter the press devoted, not merely columns, but whole pages, to this trial of strength.

I recall, with amusement, that when I had the privilege, in the summer of 1920, to have an audience with his Majesty, King Albert, "every inch a king" and one of the greatest in the golden annals of heroism, he humorously said to me, in speaking of current values, that, so far as he could see, the greatest personalities in the world were Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin. But, at that time, these great exponents of a pantomimic art, which gives the maximum of emotional expression with the minimum of mental effort, had not been eclipsed by the rising splendor of a Dempsey or a Carpentier.

Of the last count in Pope Benedict's indictment, I shall say but little. It is more appropriate for the members of that great and noble profession which is more intimately concerned with the spiritual advance of mankind. It is enough to say that, while the Church as an institution continues to exist, its authority has been greatly impaired if not destroyed, and the belief in the supernatural and even in the spiritual has been supplanted by an unprecedented spirit of gross materialism. The statistics of 1920 tell the story. With the greatest scarcity in homes ever known, more garages were built than homes or schools and more moving-picture theaters than churches or hospitals.

If you agree with me in the premises, then we are not likely to disagree in the conclusion that the causes of these grave symptoms are not ephemeral or superficial; but must have their origin in some deep-seated and world-wide change in human society. If there is to be a remedy, we must first diagnose this malady of the human soul.

Let us not "lay the flattering unction to our souls" that this spirit is but the reaction of the Great War. The present weariness and lassitude of human spirit and the disappointment and disillusion as to the aftermath of the harvest of blood may have aggravated, but they could not cause, the symptoms of which I speak; for the very obvious reason that all these symptoms were in existence and apparent to discerning men for decades before the war. Indeed, it is possible that the World War, far from causing the malady of the age, was, in itself, but one of its many symptoms.

In this age of democracy, the average individual is too apt to recognize two constitutions, one, the constitution of the State, and the second, an unwritten constitution, to him of higher authority, under which he believes that no law is obligatory which he regards as in excess of the true powers of government. Of this latter spirit, the widespread violation of the Prohibition law is a familiar illustration. A race of individualists obey reluctantly, when they obey at all, any laws which they regard as unreasonable or vexatious. It has always flourished, and the so-called "best people" have not been innocent. Thus nearly all women are involuntary smugglers. They deny the authority of the State to impose a tax upon a Paquin gown. Again, our profession must sorrowfully confess that the law's delays and laxity in administration breed a spirit of contempt and too often invite men to take the law into their own hands. These causes are so familiar that their statement is a commonplace.

#### RAMPANT INDIVIDUALISM

Proceeding to deeper and less recognized causes, some would attribute this spirit of lawlessness to the rampant individualism which began in the eighteenth century, and which has steadily and naturally grown with the advance of democratic institutions. Undoubtedly, the undue emphasis upon the rights of man, which marked the political upheaval of the close of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, has contributed to this malady of the age. Men talked, and still talk, loudly of their rights, but too rarely of their duties. And yet if we were to attribute the malady merely to excessive in-

dividualism, we would again err in mistaking a symptom for a cause.

To diagnose truly this malady we must look to some cause that is coterminous in time with the disease itself and which has been operative throughout civilization, for some fundamental and widespread change in the social conditions, for man's essential nature has changed but little, and the change must, therefore, be of environment. I know of but one change in environment that is sufficiently widespread and deep seated to account adequately for this malady of our time.

Beginning with the close of the eighteenth century, and continuing throughout the nineteenth, a prodigious transformation has taken place in the environment of man, which has done more to revolutionize the conditions of human life than all the changes that had taken place in the 500,000 preceding years which science has attributed to man's life on the planet. Up to the period of Watt's discovery of steam power as a motive power, these conditions, so far as the principal facilities of life, were substantially those of the civilization which developed eight thousand years ago on the banks of the Nile and later on the Euphrates. Man had indeed increased his conquest over nature in later centuries by mechanical inventions, such as gunpowder, the telescope, the magnetic needle, the printing press, the spinning jenny, and the hand-loom, but the characteristics of all those inventions, with the exception of gunpowder, was that they still remained a subordinate auxiliary to physical strength and mental skill of man. In other words, man still dominated the machine, and there was still full play for his physical and mental faculties. Moreover, all the inventions of preceding ages, from the first fashioning of the flint to the spinning-wheel and the hand-lever press, were all conquests of the tangible and visible forces of nature.

#### EFFECT OF NEW INVENTIONS

With Watt's utilization of steam vapor as a motive power, man suddenly passed into a new and portentous chapter of his varied history. Thenceforth, he was to multiply his powers a thousandfold by the utilization of

the invisible powers of nature, such as vapor and electricity. This prodigious change in his powers, and therefore his environment, has proceeded with ever-accelerating speed. Man has suddenly become the superman. Like the giants of the ancient fable, he has stormed the very ramparts of Divine power, or, like Prometheus, he has stolen the fire of omnipotent forces from heaven itself for his use. His voice can now reach from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and, taking wings in his aeroplane, he can fly in one swift flight from Nova Scotia to England, or he can leave Lausanne and, resting upon the icy summit of Mt. Blanc, like "the herald, Mercury, new-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill," he can again plunge into the void, and thus outfly the eagles themselves. In this acquiring from the forces of nature almost illimitable power, he has minimized the necessity for his own physical exertion or even mental skill. The machine now not only acts for him, but almost *thinks* for him. Is it surprising that so portentous a change should have fevered his brain and disturbed his mental equilibrium? A new ideal, which he proudly called "progress," obsessed him, the ideal of quantity and not quality. His practical religion became that of acceleration and facilitation—to do things more quickly and easily—and thus to minimize exertion became his great objective. Less and less he relied upon the initiative of his own brain and muscle, and more and more he put his faith in the power of machinery to relieve him of labor.

#### FLOCKING TO THE CITIES

This almost infinite multiplication of human power has tended to intoxicate man. The lust for physical power has obsessed him, without regard to whether it be constructive or destructive. He consumes the treasures of the earth faster than it produces them, deforesting its surface and disemboweling its hidden wealth. As he feverishly multiplied the things he desired, even more feverishly he multiplied his wants. To gain these, he sought the congested centers of human life. And while the world, as a whole, is not over-populated, the leading countries of civilization were subjected to this tremendous pressure of over-population. Europe, which,



at the beginning of the nineteenth century, barely numbered 100,000,000 people, suddenly grew nearly fivefold. Millions left the farms to gather into the cities to exploit their new and seemingly easy conquest over nature. In our own country, as recently as 1880, only 15 per cent of our people were crowded in the cities, 85 per cent remained upon the farms and still followed that occupation, which, of all occupations, still preserves, in its integrity, the dominance of human labor over the machine. Today, 52 per cent of our population is in the cities, and with many of them, existence is both feverish and artificial. While they have employment, many of them do not themselves work, but spend their lives in watching machines work. The result has been a minute subdivision of labor that has denied to many workers the true significance and physical benefit of labor.

The direct results of this excessive tendency to specialization, whereby not only the work but the worker becomes divided into mere fragments, are threefold. In the first place, narrowness, due to the confinement to a single action in which the elements of human skill or strength are largely eliminated; secondly, monotony, in the assimilation of man to a machine, whereby seemingly the machine dominates man and not man the machine, and, thirdly, irrationality, in that work became dissociated in the mind of the worker with any complete or satisfying achievement. The worker does not see the fruit of his labor, and cannot therefore be truly satisfied. To spend one's life in opening a valve to make a part of a pin is, as Ruskin pointed out, demoralizing in its tendencies. The clerk who watches an adding machine has little opportunity for self-expression. Thus millions of men have lost both the opportunity for real physical exertion, the incentive to work in the joyous competition of skill, and finally the reward of work in the conscious sense of achievement.

#### QUANTITY, NOT QUALITY

More serious than this, however, has been the destructive obsession of quantity, the great object of the mechanical age, at the expense of quality. Take, for example, the printing press. No one can question the



immense advantages which have flowed from the increased facilities for transmitting ideas. But may it not be true that the thousand-fold increase in such transmission by the rotary press has also tended to muddy the current thought of the time and bewilder the brain of the average man. True it is that the printing press has piled up great treasures of human knowledge, which make this age the richest in accessible information in the history of the world. I am not speaking of accessible knowledge; but of the current thought of the living generation. I gravely question whether it has the same clarity as the brain of the generation which fashioned the Constitution of the United States. Our Fathers could not talk over the telephone for three thousand miles; but have we surpassed them in thoughts of enduring value? Washington and Franklin could not travel sixty miles an hour in a railroad train, or with twice that speed in an aeroplane; but does it follow that they did not travel to as good purpose as we, who scurry to and fro like the ants in a disordered ant-heap?

Unquestionably, man of today has a thousand ideas suggested to him by the newspaper and the library where our ancestors had one; but have we the same spirit of calm inquiry and do we coordinate the facts we know as wisely as the Fathers did? Today, man has a cinematographic brain. A thousand images are impressed daily upon the screen of his consciousness and they are as fleeting as moving-pictures in a cinema theater. The American press prints every year over twenty-nine billion issues. No one can question its educational value in its best estate, for potentially the best of all colleges is the University of Gutenberg. If it printed only the truth, its value would be infinite; but who can say in what proportions of this vast volume of printed matter are the true and the false?

Before the beginning of the present mechanical age, the current of living thought could be likened to a mountain stream, which though confined within narrow banks yet had waters of transparent clearness. May not the current of thought of our time be compared with the mighty Mississippi in the period of a spring freshet? Its banks are wide and its current swift, but the opaque

stream that flows onward is one of muddy swirls and eddies and overflows its banks to their destruction.

### WORK AND CHARACTER

The great indictment, however, of the present age of mechanical power is that it has largely destroyed the spirit of work. The great enigma which it propounds to us, and which, like the riddle of the Sphinx, we will solve or be destroyed, is this: Has the increase in the potential of human power, through thermo-dynamics, been accompanied by a corresponding increase in the potential of human character?

To this life-and-death question, a great French philosopher, Le Bon, writing in 1910, replied that the one unmistakable symptom of human life was the increasing "deterioration in human character," and a great physicist has described the symptom as the "progressive enfeeblement of the human will." In a famous book, "Degeneration," written at the close of the nineteenth century, Max Nordau, as a pathologist, explains this tendency by arguing that our complex civilization has placed too great a strain upon the limited nervous organization of man. A great financier once said of an existing financial condition that it was suffering from "undigested securities," and, paraphrasing him, is it not possible that man is suffering from undigested achievements and that his salvation must lie in adaptation to a new environment, which, measured by any standard known to science, is a thousand-fold greater in this year of grace than it was at the beginning of the nineteenth century?

Do not misunderstand me. No one would be rash enough to urge such a retrogression to primitive conditions as the abandonment of labor-saving machinery would involve. Indeed, it would be impossible; for, in speaking of its evils, I freely recognize that not only would civilization perish without its beneficent aid, but that every step forward in the history of man has been coincident with, and in large part attributable to, a new mechanical invention.

But—the inevitable "but"—suppose the development of labor-saving machinery should reach the stage where

all human labor were eliminated, what would be the effect on man? The answer is contained in an experiment which Sir John Lubbock made with a tribe of ants. Originally the most voracious and militant of their species, when denied the opportunity for exercise and freed from the necessity of foraging for their food, in three generations they became anemic and perished. Take from man the opportunity of work and the sense of pride in achievement, and you have taken from him the very life of his existence. Robert Burns could sing as he drove his ploughshare through the fields of Ayr. Today, millions, who simply watch an automatic infallible machine, which requires neither strength nor skill, do not sing at their work; but many curse the fate which has chained them, like Ixion, to a soulless machine.

The evil is even greater. The specialization of our modern mechanical civilization has caused a submergence of the individual into the group or class. Man is fast ceasing to be the unit of human society; self-governing groups are becoming the new units. This is true of all classes of men, the employer as well as the employee. The true justification for the anti-monopoly statutes, including the Sherman anti-trust law, lies not so much in the realm of economics as it does in that of morals. With the submergence of the individual, whether he be capitalist or wage-earner, into a group, there has followed the dissipation of moral responsibility. A mass morality has been substituted for individual morality, and, unfortunately, group morality generally intensifies the vices more than the virtues of man.

#### SPIRIT OF ORGANIZATION

Possibly, the greatest result of the mechanical age is this spirit of organization. Its merits are manifold and do not require statement; but they have blinded us to the demerits of excessive organization. We are now beginning to see—slowly, but surely—that a faculty of organization which, as such, submerged the spirit of individualism, is not an unmixed good. Indeed, the moral lesson of the tragedy of Germany is the demoralizing influence of organization carried to the nth power. No nation was

ever more highly organized than this modern State. Physically, intellectually and spiritually, it had become a highly-developed machine; and its dominating mechanical spirit so submerged the individual that, in 1914, the paradox was observed of an enlightened nation that was seemingly destitute of a conscience.

What was true of Germany, however, was true, although in lesser degree, of all civilized nations. In all of them, the individual had been submerged in group formations, and the effect upon the character of man has not been beneficial. This may explain the paradox of so-called "progress." It may be likened to a great wheel, which, from the increasing domination of mechanical forces, developed an ever-accelerating speed, until, by centrifugal action, it went off its bearings in 1914 in an unprecedented catastrophe. As man slowly pulls himself out of that gigantic wreck and recovers consciousness, he begins to realize that speed is not necessarily progress.

If we of this generation can only recognize that the evil exists, then the situation is not past remedy; for man has never yet found himself in a blind alley of negation. He is still captain of his soul and master of his fate, and, to me, the most encouraging sign of the times is the persistent evidence of contemporary literature that thoughtful men now recognize that much of our boasted progress was as unreal as a rainbow. While the temper of the times seems for the moment pessimistic, it merely marks the recognition of man of an abyss whose existence he barely suspected but over which his indomitable courage will yet carry him.

I have faith in the inextinguishable spark of the Divine which is in the human soul and which our complex mechanical civilization has not wholly extinguished. Of this, the World War was itself a proof. All the horrible resources of mechanics and chemistry were utilized to coerce the human soul, and all proved ineffectual. Never did men rise to greater heights of self-sacrifice or show a greater fidelity "even unto death." Millions went to their graves, as to their beds, for an ideal; and when that is possible, this Pandora's box of modern civilization,

from which all imaginable evils have escaped, at least leaves hope behind.

### THE IMPULSE TO LIVE

I am reminded of a remark that the great Rumanian statesman, Taku Jonescu, made during the Peace Conference at Paris. When asked his views as to the future of civilization, he replied: "Judged by the light of reason there is but little hope, but I have faith in man's inextinguishable impulse to live." Thank God, that cannot be affected by any change in man's environment! For even when the caveman retreated from the advance of the polar cap, which once covered Europe with Arctic desolation, he not only defied the elements and the wild beasts in his rude cave, but he showed even then the love of the sublime by beautifying the walls of his icy prison with those mural decorations which were the beginning of art. Assuredly, the man of today, with the godly heritage of countless ages, can do no less. He has but to diagnose the evil and he will then, in some way, meet it.

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## A Word to Labor

**N**OW, when labor feels its power, it will probably have temptations to grasp too much. Capital and labor are both required for the common good. Conflict between them is bound in the long run to injure both. Why not, then, submit their quarrels to an impartial tribunal and abide by the result? The duties of both are clearly defined by Catholic teaching. As early as the fourth century, the Fathers of the Church laid down the doctrine that surplus profits are due, in a measure, to the poor—that man is not an absolute owner, but only a steward of the wealth committed to him, and that all are bound by the law of charity. Although all men are equal before God, yet social or economic equality is impossible. There must be a division of labor and a distinction of classes. There must be hard work for some and easy work for others. But there is one power which can soften

all asperities of social inequality—namely the power of religion.

The teaching of religion is that life is not final, that we are all, in the Providence of God, allotted a mission, and that God will reward all according to their works and opportunities. While the direct message of St. Joseph's life is a message to the honest working man to be content with a competency, his life contains this indirect message to all workers: "The faithful man shall be praised," be he a statesman, an employer, or a professional man. If it be said that there are workmen and workwomen who cannot get a competency through no fault of their own, there still remains the power of religion to weave miserable days into the web of a noble life. . . . A figure is always standing on the highways and the byways of the world, a Figure stamped with the iron brand of suffering and toil, a Figure with outstretched arms, crying "Come to Me, all you that labor and are heavy-burdened; I will refresh you."